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A N N E X

27 June 1949

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SOPHOULIS' DEATH

The death on 24 June of the Greek Liberal Prime Minister, Themistocles Sophoulis, probably means the end of the Liberal-Populist coalition and the beginning of sharply intensified party and personal rivalry. It may even result in a move toward authoritarian government. There appears to be in Parliament no potential successor to Sophoulis possessing the required ability to command approval and restrain political factionalism. Populist chief Tsaldaris, Foreign Minister under Sophoulis and himself an ex-Premier, has been given the first opportunity to form a new cabinet. With 37% of the seats in Parliament, the Populists may find it easier than any other group to muster enough minor-party support to carry Parliament. Continued Liberal-Populist cooperation of the kind achieved by Sophoulis is unlikely, however, because leading elements in both parties will welcome an occasion for a test of party strength. Furthermore, a slate headed by Tsaldaris will probably encounter considerable high-level friction, inasmuch as he has, at least until very recently, been out of favor with the King and has also irritated Army Commander in Chief Papagos.

If, as seems quite possible, Tsaldaris fails in the initial attempt to form a new cabinet, the second chance may fall to the 74-year-old Diomedes, Liberal Vice Premier under Sophoulis, or to some similar figure without strong political coloring. Diomedes is a highly respected financier who might be able temporarily to preserve the old coalition cabinet, but his task would soon become much more difficult because of his relative inexperience in politics and his lack of a stabilizing force comparable to Sophoulis'. One or two minor politicians may also be invited to try their luck at forming a cabinet, but with diminished chances of success. The King, rather than endure prolonged political bickering and maneuvering,

- i -

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may then be tempted to adjourn Parliament and to appoint an interim government designed to exercise strong powers in close collaboration with the military command under General Papagos. Such a development, although likely to remove the friction between political and military leaders which has been detrimental to the effectiveness of the Greek Army, would have sharp political repercussions in Greece and would expose the US to further Soviet charges of lending support to non-democratic governments.

- ii -

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